

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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INFO USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

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E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, AG
SUBJ: ALGERIAN TRADE UNION CONGRESS

1. SUMMARY: MAJOR RESULTS OF 5TH CONGRESS OF ALGERIAN STATE TRADE UNION WERE REPLACEMENT OF BODY'S SECYGEN WITH FORMER COMMUNIST, OUSTER OF MOST OF UNION'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, AND BOUMEDIENE'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT MINIMUM INDUSTRIAL WAGE WOULD RISE 25 PERCENT. WAGE INCREASE SHOULD BENEFIT SUBSTANTIAL PERCENTAGE OF LABOR FORCE. LABOR SCENE HAD BEEN TROUBLED PRIOR TO CONGRESS, AND WORKERS HAD VOICED THEIR DISCONTENT AND THEIR DESIRE FOR GREATER UNION MILITANCY IN DEBATES BOTH BEFORE AND DURING CONGRESS. FINAL CONGRESS COMMUNIQUES DO NOT FOR MOST PART ADDRESS THESE ISSUES. DESPITE SEEMING SOCIALIST SOLIDARITY OF CONGRESS, HARD TRUTHS OF INADEQUATE WORKERS' PAY AND BENEFITS AND GREATER LABOR MILITANCY REMAIN PROBLEMS OF NEW UNION LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

2. FROM MARCH 25-29, GENERAL UNION OF ALGERIAN WORKERS (UGTA) HELD ITS FIFTH CONGRESS. SUCH GATHERINGS NORMALLY HELD EVERY FOUR YEARS, BUT LATEST CONGRESS WAS POSTPONED FOR A YEAR, OSTENSIBLY BECAUSE OF REGIME'S PREOCCUPATION WITH ELECTIONS. 1083 DELEGATES, REPRE-

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SENTING A UGTA MEMBERSHIP CLAIMED TO NUMBER 800,000-1,000,000, ATTENDED PROCEEDINGS. ONLY 275 OF THESE WERE WORKERS. REST LISTED AS FUNCTIONARIES OR TECHNICIANS. 71. DELEGATIONS FROM FOREIGN AND INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS ALSO PRESENT. FLN CHIEF YAHIAOUI OCCUPIED PROMINENT PLACE ON DIAS AND ADDRESSED GATHERING AT CONCLUSION OF ITS DELIBERATIONS. IN ADDITION TO DEBATING UGTA'S PAST PERFORMANCE AND FUTURE ORIENTATION, CONGRESS' NINE COMMITTEES EACH

PRODUCED RESOLUTIONS, AND DELEGATES CHOSE NEW NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMISSION AND NATIONAL SECRETARIAT.

3. BOUMEDIENE ADDRESSED CONGRESS' OPENING SESSION MARCH 26, AND ANNOUNCED DECISION TO RAISE NATIONAL MINIMUM INDUSTRIAL WAGE FROM 150 DOLLARS TO 200 DOLLARS PER MONTH. HIS SPEECH WAS LESS CRITICAL OF WORKERS' FAILURE TO WIN BATTLE OF PRODUCTION THAN HIS OTHER LABOR-ORIENTED PRONOUNCEMENTS IN RECENT PAST. A MAJOR THEME WAS INADEQUACY OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY FOR NEEDS OF THIRD WORLD.

4. FOLLOWING FOUR DAYS OF DISCUSSIONS AND WORK IN COMMITTEE, CONGRESS ELECTED NEW 94-MEMBER EXECUTIVE COMMISSION. (83 ELECTED OFFICIALS PLUS GENERAL SECRETARIES OF UGTA'S 11 NATIONAL FEDERATIONS WHICH ARE FUNCTIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS). ACCORDING TO LE MONDE'S ACCOUNT OF PROCEEDINGS, THERE WERE THREE CANDIDATES FOR EACH POSITION, FIRST TIME UGTA HAS BEEN SO DEMOCRATIC. EXECUTIVE COMMISSION THEN ELECTED 15-MEMBER NATIONAL SECRETARIAT FROM AMONG ITS NUMBER, AND NEW UGTA SECYGEN ALSO CHOSEN. AGAIN ACCORDING TO LE MONDE, NEW UGTA LEADERSHIP IS LARGELY COMPOSED OF FUNCTIONARIES RATHER THAN WORKERS.

5. MOST OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND NATIONAL SECRETARIAT REPLACED. ONLY 17 MEMBERS OF FORMER BODY RETAINED AND 3 OF LATTER. OF NATIONAL SECRETARIES ELECTED, 6 ARE HOLDERS FROM LAST EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND 5 NEW. FORMER SECYGEN BENIKOUS AND HIS DEPUTY, ABDELMADJID AZZI, WERE NOT ELECTED TO NATIONAL SECRETARIAT, ALTHOUGH THEY RETAINED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POSITIONS ON EXECUTIVE COMMISSION. BENIKOUS, LE MONDE SAYS, DID NOT SEEK REELECTION AS SECYGEN.

6. APPARENTLY AS PART OF REGIME'S EFFORT TO IMPOSE TIGHTER FLN CONTROL OVER UNION, ALL EXECUTIVE COMMISSION MEMBERS REQUIRED TO BE IN PARTY. NEVERTHELESS, ACCORDING TO LE MONDE, TWO MEMBERS OF CLANDESTINE BUT TOLERATED COMMUNIST PARTY (PARTI DE L'AVANT GRADE SOCIALISTE) MANAGED TO GET THEMSELVES ELECTED.

7. NEW SECYGEN, ABDALLAH DEMENE DEBH, WAS ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, A MEMBER OF ALGERIAN COMMUNIST PARTY BEFORE ALGERIAN REVOLUTION. HE WAS ALSO ACTIVE IN COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED FRENCH CONFEDERATION GENERALE DE TRAVAIL (CGT), BUT WAS NEVER A BLUE COLLAR WORKER. ACCORDING TO FRENCH EMBASSY, HIS VIGOROUS WORK IN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT LED TO HIS ARREST BY FRENCH IN LATE 1940'S. FRENCH RECORDS OF PERIOD DESCRIBE HIM AS AN INTELLIGENT, DYNAMIC AND POPULAR FIGURE. HE JOINED FLN CAUSE SHORTLY AFTER OUTBREAK OF REVOLUTION IN 1954, BUT THERE IS SOME QUESTION AS TO HOW LONG HE HAS FORMALLY BEEN MEMBER OF FLN. FOLLOWING INDEPENDENCE, HE WORKED WITH UGTA, PRESIDED OVER 4TH CONGRESS IN 1973, AND WAS ELECTED TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AT THAT TIME. HIS LAST POSITION IN UNION WAS SECYGEN OF ALGIERS WILAYA (PROVINCE) UNION.

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8. GENERAL POLITICAL RESOLUTION READ AT CLOSE OF CONGRESS COVERED WATERFRONT. DOCUMENT WENT OUT OF ITS WAY TO PRAISE BOUMEDIENE, TO CEDE POSITION OF LEADERSHIP TO FLN, AND TO REDEDICATE UGTA TO BATTLE FOR PRODUCTION, SOCIALIST MANAGEMENT OF ENTERPRISES, AND FIGHT AGAINST WASTE, BUREAUCRACY AND SLOTHFULNESS. IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MOROCCANS, MAURITANIANS, FRENCH AND SADAT WERE WHIPPING BOYS. TREATMENT OF FRENCH MORE PERFUNCTORY THAN HAS BEEN CASE IN OTHER, RECENT ALGERIAN PRONOUNCEMENTS, AND FRENCH UNIONISTS AT CONGRESS RECEIVED GOOD COVERAGE IN OFFICIAL PRESS DESPITE RECENT UGTA CRITICISM OF CGT ROLE IN FORMER'S CREATION.

9. OTHER CONGRESS ACTIONS INCLUDE:

A. REDUCTION OF NUMBER OF FUNCTIONAL UNION FEDERATIONS FROM SEVENTEEN TO ELEVEN. DOCKERS AND RAILWAY WORKERS, FOR EXAMPLE, MERGED INTO TRANSPORT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS FEDERATION. BOTH DOCKERS AND RAILWAY WORKERS HAVE STAGED STRIKERS IN PAST YEAR, AND REDUCTION IN NUMBER OF FEDERATIONS WIDELY SEEN AS MOVE TO BRING UNRULY UNION SECTIONS UNDER TIGHTER CONTROL.

B. CREATION OF UNION ORGANIZATIONS AT LEVEL OF COMMUNE, LOWEST ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT IN COUNTRY. THIS MOVE, WHICH RANK AND FILE ARE SAID TO HAVE ADVOCATED, EXPECTED TO ENCOURAGE "HORIZONTAL CONTACTS"

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BETWEEN LOW LEVEL UNION GROUPINGS, THUS PERMITTING THESE BODIES TO COORDINATE THEIR POSITIONS IN DEALING WITH HIGHER REACHES OF UGTA HIERARCHY.

C. APPLICATION OF SOCIALIST MANAGEMENT OF ENTERPRISES PRINCIPLE THROUGHOUT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRY AND CLARIFICATION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNIT WORKERS' ASSEMBLIES AND UNION ORGANIZATIONS.

D. IMPROVEMENT OF WORKERS' LIVING CONDITIONS, PARTICULARLY IN AREAS OF HEALTH AND HOUSING.

E. INVITATION TO TUNISIAN PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO FREE IMPRISONED TUNISIAN LABOR LEADER ACHOUR.

10. ALTHOUGH CONGRESS REPORTEDLY ENDED ON NOTE OF EXCEPTIONAL ENTHUSIASM FOR REGIME (BOUMEDIENE SAID TO HAVE BEEN APPLAUDED FOR 20 MINUTES AT CLOSING SESSION), PROCEEDINGS WERE NOT WITHOUT CONTROVERSY

AT OPENING OF CONGRESS LEADERSHIP ATTEMPTED TO PUT THOROUGHLY FULING THAT ONLY HEADS OF VARIOUS REGIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL DELEGATIONS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO SPEAK. DELEGATES PROTESTED THIS MOVE TO YAHIAOUI, AND IT WAS QUICKLY DECIDED THAT ALL PRESENT SHOULD HAVE RIGHT TO SAY THEIR PIECE. ALTHOUGH THIS DECISION MEANT LATE NIGHTS FOR DELEGATES, IT SEEMS TO HAVE IMPROVED ATMOSPHERE AT CONGRESS.

11. OFFICIAL PRESS ACCOUNTS OF FIRST DAYS OF CONGRESS MAKE IT CLEAR THAT DELEGATES WERE AT TIMES CRITICAL OF UGTA'S RECORD. DEBATES APPARENTLY RAISED FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS AS TO UNION'S ROLE AND PLACE IN ALGERIAN SOCIETY, AND TRENCHANT CRITICISMS OF UGTA HEARD IN PRE-CONGRESS DEBATES CAME TO FORE ONCE MORE. DELEGATES, PARTICULARLY THOSE FROM ALGIERS AND ORAN, SPOKE OF UGTA'S CONFUSION OF ITS TRUE ROLE AS DEFENDER OF WORKERS' RIGHTS WITH THAT OF MANAGER UNDER SOCIALIST MANAGEMENT OF ENTERPRISES PROGRAM. HEAVY HAND OF FLN IN UNION BUSINESS WAS CRITICIZED AS WELL. AT LEAST ONE DELEGATION ALSO QUESTIONED UGTA'S CLAIM TO 800,000-1,000,000 MEMBERS. DELEGATION NOTED THAT THIS REPRESENTED DRAMATIC GROWTH SINCE 4TH CONGRESS

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IN 1973, WHEN UNION HAD AROUND 350,000 MEMBERS, AND OPINED THAT MEMBERSHIP NOT OVER 700,000. (LE MONDE ESTIMATED FIGURE AT 700,000-750,000, AND ONE POST-CONGRESS OFFICIAL PRESS ACCOUNT GAVE IT AS 650,000). YET ANOTHER CONCERN OF DELEGATES WAS REPORT THAT BILL ON STATUS OF WORKERS NOW BEFORE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONTAINED SPECIFIC PROVISION BANNING STRIKES IN STATE-RUN ENTERPRISES. DELEGATES ARE SAID TO HAVE EXPRESSED OPEN OPPOSITION TO SUCH A PROHIBITION.

12. COMMENT: AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, CONGRESS TOOK PLACE AMID SIGNS OF FURTHER TROUBLE ON ALGERIAN LABOR SCENE. RANK AND FILE UNHAPPY AT FAILURE OF MANY STATE ENTERPRISES TO PAY PROMISED SALARY INCREASES, AND WORK STOPPAGES IN SEVERAL STATE ENTERPRISES HAVE RESULTED. BOTH DISCUSSIONS AT CONGRESS AND DEBATES IN PRELIMINARY MEETINGS SUGGEST THAT SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF WORKERS FAVOR

MORE DEMOCRATIC, WESTERN-STYLE UNION, APPEARANCE OF COMMUNIST ELEMENTS IN LEADERSHIP NOTWITHSTANDING.

13. EFFORT ON WORKERS' PART TO TRANSFORM UGTA INTO CHAMPION OF LABOR AGAINST MANAGEMENT WOULD APPEAR TO PUT THEM ON COLLISION COURSE WITH A REGIME WHICH REJECTS LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC OPTION. IF WORKERS CAN BE KEPT REASONABLY HAPPY THROUGH GRANTING OF SALARY INCREASES AND OTHER BENEFITS, THIS DIFFERENCE UNLIKELY TO CAUSE DIFFICULTIES. IN THIS CONNECTION, 25 PERCENT MINIMUM PAY INCREASE WOULD APPEAR LIKELY TO AFFECT LARGE PERCENTAGE OF ALGERIAN WORKERS AND NOT MERELY BOTTOM OF INDUSTRIAL SECTOR BARREL. NEVERTHELESS, OUR STONG IMPRESSION IS THAT LABOR HERE IS BOTH INTERESTED IN BIGGER SLICE OF PIE AND MORE WILLING TO TAKE DIRECT ACTION TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE. THIS ATTITUDE, WE SUSPECT, WILL REMAIN FACT OF LIFE WHICH NO AMOUNT OF POST-CONGRESS TRIUMPHALISM WILL SUCCEED IN GLOSSING OVER.

14. FOR LABOR DEPARTMENT: PARAS 1, 7, 12, AND 13 ABOVE ARE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. REST UNCLASSIFIED.

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